

# Reaching Out to the Hard to Reach: Curriculum Integration for Academically Underprepared Adult Learners

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- Who's in the room?



# Context of Your Work

Public School

Community College

Corrections

Community-based

Workplace

# Levels With Which You Work

Post-GED/High School

GED preparation

Pre-GED

Adult basic/literacy

ESL

# Experience With Adult Education

More than 10 years

5 – 9 years

1 – 4 years

Less than a year



# Article from LA Times

# Picture In Your Mind!

350,000 – 540,000 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders leave school each year before completing

At any given point in time, approximately four million young adults not enrolled in school

Add to this the number of adults functioning at Level One on literacy surveys

# Our Focus

The academically under-prepared learner



In an increasingly knowledge-based world and economy:

What will these individuals do?

What will happen to them?

# Three Main Points

1. Many adults are academically under-prepared for postsecondary education
2. Conventional approaches to addressing their needs are partially successful
3. Curriculum integration represents a promising alternative

# Importance of Postsecondary Education

- Cherry Commission Report
  - Michigan must forge an expectation that all students will achieve a postsecondary degree or credential
- Stephen Reder
  - High school diploma or its equivalent is no longer an adequate credential for most jobs in today's market
- Carnevale & Fry
  - 70% of all new jobs created by 2008 will require at least some postsecondary education

But, many adults and young adults  
are not academically prepared

Basic skills in  
reading, writing or mathematics

Computer skills

Study skills necessary for  
college-level work



# “Sources” of Academically Under-prepared Adult Learners

- Learners who leave high school before graduation
  - National average about 33%
  - Much higher in urban areas
- Graduates who lack knowledge and skills required for academic work
  - 53% of students entering our colleges and universities are under-prepared
  - Since 1996, a 33% increase in the number of academically under-prepared students

--AAC&U



# Consequences of Academic Under-preparedness

- Lack of success in postsecondary education
- Dropouts have 30% higher unemployment than grads
- Increased likelihood of incarceration
- Increased reliance on public assistance

# The Need

Educational approaches to help  
transition academically underprepared  
young adult and adult learners for  
college-level work

# Approaches to the Problem

“Conventional” or “Literacy-based”

“Nontraditional” or “Contextual”

# Conventional Approaches

Adult basic education/adult literacy

GED preparation/High school completion

Developmental/remedial education



# Assumptions of Conventional Approaches

- Under-preparedness is a literacy problem
- Curricular structures similar to what students left
- Pedagogy and advising more personal and intense



# Challenges for Conventional Programs

- “Second chance” programs enroll a fraction of target population
- Noncompletion rates are high (40 – 70+%)
  - ABE, adult literacy, GED prep
  - Developmental education
- Many graduates not ready for college work

# Alternative Approaches

Emphasize learning of academic skills within relevant life contexts



# Assumptions of Contextual Approaches

- What students left will not necessarily work for them now
- Learning needs to be more experience-based, build on prior knowledge
- Social dimension of learning is critical
- Relationship between the curriculum and the learner's real world

# Examples of Nontraditional Approaches

Workplace literacy

Family literacy/Even Start

Cognitive apprenticeships

Learning communities



# Curriculum Integration

An Example of a Contextual Approach

What we mean by this term

Various ways it is manifest in practice



# Integration of Academic and Occupational Curricula

Addresses strong career and occupational orientation of many young adult and adult learners

# What Does This Mean?

- Learning by doing
- Master knowledge and skills by applying them to practical, meaningful problems of everyday life
- Subject areas are connected and interrelated through problems or themes
- Problems, situations and cases are work, occupation, or career-based

# Curriculum Integration

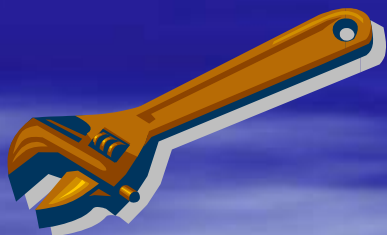
- A not-so-new idea worth revisiting



# Hardly a new idea:

*Education through occupations... combines within itself more of the factors conducive to learning than any other method*

--John Dewey, 1916





# Recent National Emphases

- Commissions and studies advocating stronger connection of vocational education to academic curriculum
- Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act - 1985, 1990, 1998
- School to Work Opportunities Act
- National family literacy and workplace literacy programs

Integration a key aspect of strategies  
to improve teaching and learning

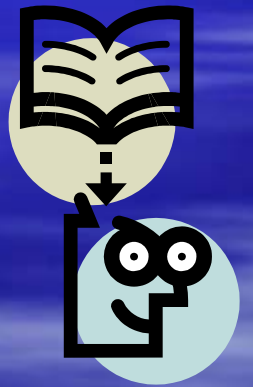
Collaborative learning

Case-based or problem-based learning

Contextual and active learning

Service learning

# Planning an Integrated Approach to Academic and Occupational Curriculum



# Levels of Integration

- Course level/infused content
  - e.g. writing a cover letter for a job in English composition
- Cross-curricular
  - e.g., accounting and English; science and automotive technology
- Programmatic
  - e.g., Career clusters, pathways, or majors (health)
- School-wide
  - e.g., career academies; professional schools



# Things To Keep In Mind

- Be clear about objectives
- Cross-walk academic competencies with work-related standards or objectives
- Pedagogical strategies need to be consistent with curricular aims

# Developing an Integrated Curriculum: An Example

- Medical clinic that provides services to pregnant teenagers and teenage moms who had left school
- Desire to use services to also help them address academic goals
- Can we integrate GED competencies with their interests and content being provided?

# Elements of the Curriculum Model

Life experience and theme

Objectives

GED competencies

Potential learning strategies  
and formats

# Illustration of an Integrated Approach

Integrated theme-based instruction

“Getting a good job”



# Key Attributes of an Integrated Approach

- Targets a few well-defined work-related objectives and GED competencies
- Involves learners in project that is personally meaningful to them
- Work-related learning contributes directly to development of academic competencies

# Advancing Curriculum Integration in Adult Education

- Infusing occupational content into academic subjects
- Ground academic subjects within career clusters or pathways
- Using of learning communities around themes

# Advancing Curriculum Integration in Adult Education

- Use of project-based or problem-based learning strategies
- Collaboration with ISD skill centers
- Collaboration with WFD programs at community college

# Conclusion – What is Needed

- Provide transition for underprepared adult learners to postsecondary education
- Integration of occupational and academic curriculum as a promising approach
- Focus on developing educational experiences *better* than in the mainstream



The Best to All of You

Keep Up Your Great Work!

Thank You!